



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

**Fish and Wildlife Service
National Park Service**

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
IMPROVE ACCESS TO FISHING SITES FOR DISABLED

Fishing, a favorite pastime of more than 34 million Americans, has been out of reach of millions of citizens whose disabilities made it difficult or impossible for them to gain access to fishing sites.

But that is changing in many areas of the country because of new projects undertaken by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service.

"President Bush wants every American to have the opportunity to experience the joy that he feels when he goes fishing," said Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan. "At the Department, we have given high priority to projects that will provide easier access to fishing for people who have disabilities."

At nine sites from Washington, D.C., to Seattle, Washington, the two Department of the Interior agencies have built or plan to build barrier-free fishing facilities to allow access to disabled anglers.

In addition, many States have constructed fishing ramps and other accommodations for disabled citizens with money from the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Fund, supported by Federal excise taxes on fishing equipment.

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"No American should be denied the pleasure of casting a line on a quiet lake at dawn or the thrill of reeling in a whopper just because they are disabled," said Mike Hayden, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, who issued a call to action to the two agencies to improve access for disabled people on public lands.

"The Interior Department is committed to the principle that enjoying the great outdoors is every American's birthright," Hayden said, "and we are determined to knock down the barriers standing between our citizens and that birthright."

The projects undertaken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service include:

- o A disabled-access fishing pier on Cash Lake at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Prince Georges County, Maryland. The Patuxent pier, completed during the summer of 1991, accommodates wheelchairs and provides good angling for bass, bluegill, and pickerel. The site can accommodate 50 disabled fishermen a day and offers tremendous wildlife viewing opportunities.
- o A planned \$1-million state-of-the-art disabled-access fishing area at the National Fisheries Research Center in Leetown, West Virginia, that includes both a trout pond and a bass pond with accessible piers, walkways, and fishing islands. The new facility, which is still in the design phase, will accommodate more than 125 disabled anglers a day including veterans from the nearby Martinsburg Veterans Hospital.
- o Development of an urban fishing area in Chicago in concert with the Cook County Forest Preserve District, the State of Illinois, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The project will include at least two disabled-access fishing areas and several wetland wildlife observation points on a 120-acre urban lake. It will accommodate 60 disabled anglers a day.
- o Plans for transfer of 10 acres from the Navy's Puget Sound Naval Station to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the construction of a disabled-access fishing area in Seattle, Washington. The transfer, if approved under the Congressional Base Closure and Realignment Process, will benefit children from the nearby Seattle Children's Hospital and Medical Center and disabled children in the King County area. Both projects would be built through public-private partnerships.

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Meanwhile, the National Park Service has identified five projects in the Washington, D.C., area to be included in its Barrier Free Fishing Action Plan. The projects are at Hains Point (East Potomac Park), West Potomac Park, Anacostia Park, Theodore Roosevelt Island, all in the District, and Jones Point in Alexandria, Virginia.

The National Park Service will improve fishing quality, increase access and parking for vehicles used by disabled people, increase availability of restrooms and water, monitor water levels at low tide, and upgrade the landscape and site accommodations.

Work will include designation of disabled parking spaces, construction of wheelchair-accessible curb ramps and special fishing piers, procurement of new comfort facilities, and modification of existing railings to allow anglers in wheelchairs to safely enjoy fishing in traditional Potomac and Anacostia River hot spots alongside their friends and neighbors.

Under the Federal Aid in Sport Fish program, which is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, many States have opened fishing opportunities for disabled citizens. The Federal Aid fund pays up to 75 percent of the cost of a project.

The fund is supported by a 10-percent excise tax on fishing equipment and a 3-percent tax on electric trolling motors and sonar fish finders. The money is apportioned according to a formula that takes into account the number of licensed fishermen in a State and the size of its land and water resources. No State gets more than 5 percent or less than 1 percent of the total.

For example, the State of Mississippi used Federal Aid funds to construct a 350-foot fishing pier accessible to people in wheelchairs at Ross-Barnett Reservoir in Jackson, Mississippi.

States even have found ways to provide access in areas with rugged terrain. The State of Colorado, for example, joined with the Administration last year to build a boardwalk and fishing platforms for disabled anglers on the Big Thompson River west of Loveland, Colorado, even though the river flows through a steep canyon. As many as 18 anglers in wheelchairs can fish for trout in the river at one time.

"It is a tribute to this country that people at all levels of government have been working so hard to ensure everybody gets to hang a 'Gone Fishin' sign on their door once in a while," said John Turner, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.